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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION REPORT: EVENTS IN GAZA
DECEMBER Subject: Special Media Reaction Report: Events in Gaza Dec.
30-31, 2008

11. Summary: Syrian papers feature photos of Palestinian casualties
and large impassioned demonstrations in cities throughout Syria.
Papers on December 31 also carried photos of President Asad's
meeting with Senator Arlen Specter. A Syrian editorialist laments
the closure of Rafah crossing and urges Egyptian steps against
Israel.

President Asad's Meeting with U.S. Senator Arlen Specter

The Syrian Arab News Agency reported that during Senator Arlen
Specter's 12/30 meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Asad
Tuesday, the President stressed the importance of halting "the
Israeli massacres which are being committed against the unarmed
Palestinian people, lifting the unjust siege on them, and opening
all crossings permanently."

Foreign Minister Mouallem Receives phone calls from his European
Counterparts

All papers reported that Foreign Minister Mouallem received phone
calls from the French, Norwegian and Spanish foreign ministers.
Their calls focused on the dangerous developments in Gaza and the
need for Arab and international efforts to pressure Israel to halt
its "aggression" immediately, as well as the need to reach a
humanitarian truce to allow medical relief and food aid to enter
Gaza through all crossings.

Turkish Foreign Minister Erdogan to Begin Tour of the Region to
discuss Gaza

Papers on December 30 reported that Turkish FM Erdogan will begin a
tour of Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia in connection with
the Israeli air attacks against the Gaza Strip. Turkish PM Erdogan
will meet President Asad today to discuss developments in Gaza.
All papers reported Turkish President Gul's statement that Turkey's
first priority is to reach a ceasefire in Gaza and extend
humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people. Gul also warned against
the danger of the conflict's expansion beyond Gaza, which would
jeopardize the whole region.

Arab Summit:

Al-Watan on December 30 quoted informed diplomatic sources as saying

that so far only ten Arab countries have committed to attend the Arab summit, and that it is not yet clear whether enough countries will commit to attend.

Damascus-Based Palestinian Factions Reject
Abbas' Call for Meeting on Gaza

Al-Watan reported on December 30 that Damascus-based Palestinian factions categorically rejected Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' call for a meeting on Gaza.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command [PFLP-GC] described Abbas's call as confused and "too late."

Palestinian Islamic Jihad rejected the call, calling it "promotional."

In a telephone interview with Al-Watan, PFLP-GC media officer Anwar Raja said Abbas's call is "unacceptable." Raja stated that any meeting "must have a very clear agenda within natural and positive climates." He said Abbas is trying to "seize the opportunity to mend his image and make some nominal gains."

While HAMAS made no official statement on its position toward the proposed meeting, Raja stressed that the Islamic movement "is moving in the same direction" and rejects Abbas' call.

Raja strongly criticized Abbas for holding the resistance responsible for the "holocaust" in Gaza. This, he said, "provided excuses for the Zionist killing machine." He added: "Through his participation in the siege, pressure, and political incitement against the resistance in general and HAMAS in particular, Abbas is involved in the Gaza massacre."

Selected Headlines:

"President Asad discusses developments in the region with U.S. Arlen Specter. President Asad reiterates the importance of halting Israeli massacres against the Palestinian people and removing unjust siege and opening all crossings" (Government-owned Tishreen, December 31)

"An Egyptian source: A meeting between Mahmoud Abbas' officials and Israeli officers to discuss 'horizons for hitting Gaza'" (Independent al-Watan, December 31)

"Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic countries will hold an exceptional meeting on Gaza in Jeddah on Saturday" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, December 31)

"In the fourth day of Israeli aggression against Gaza: 2100 casualties among Palestinians. The resistance's missiles reach Beer Sheva" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, December 31)

Selected Editorial:

"Rafah: the Arabs' Agony"

Samira Masalmeh, Chief Editor of government-owned daily Tishreen, commented on Dec. 30: "In an attempt to divide the (Arab) nation and its countries, some are tendentiously talking about a campaign against Egypt...Egypt can do what no other Arab country can do to pressure Israel, such as break off diplomatic relations, recall its ambassador, sever economic and trade relations, or take all these measures together and open the crossings..."

"This is a turning point in the history of the Palestinian cause. It is extremely dangerous, as some are pushing things to the stage of final defeat. It is perhaps right to say now that no harm to the Palestinian cause is worse than this harm, which reaches the point of conspiracy and betrayal of the resistance if Arab silence remains the dominant factor."

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